The Concept of Adultery in Selected American Novels

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Abstract

Adultery is regarded as one of the greatest sins in all religions which saw it as vicious and forbidden act. Generally, sociologists argued that adultery, whether committed by women or men, is a social threat for both the individual and society. This paper presents the concept of adultery as it was reflected in Nathaniel Hawthorne's ***The Scarlet Letter*** (1850) and Francis Scott Fitzgerald's ***The Great Gatsby*** (1925) during the seventeenth and twentieth centuries respectively. The aim of this paper is to give attention to the definition of adultery as a dangerous act that affects the people's behaviour towards adulterer or adulteress. It also shows adultery, a major theme in the history of American literature, as an outlet from an oppressive marriage. In addition, it scrutinises the causes and effects of such a scandalous act.

المستخلص

تعد الخيانة الزوجية أحد الذنوب العظمى في جميع الأديان التي اعتبرته كفعل شرير ومحرّم. عموما، يقول علماء الاجتماع بأنّ الزنا هو تهديد للفرد والمجتمع، سواء أن ارتكبه الرجل أو المرأة . يقدّم البحث مفهوم الزنا كما هو كاتسبي العظيم الشارة القرمزية (١٨٥٠) ورواية فرانسس سكوت فيزجيرالد، هوثورن، موضح في رواية ناثنيال (١٩٢٥) أثناء القرنين السابع عشر والعشرين على التوالي. إنّ هدف هذه الدراسة هو جلب الانتباه إلى تعريف الزنا كفعل خطر يؤثّر على سلوك الناس نحو الزاني أو الزانية، ثم يقدم البحث الزنا موضوعا رئيسيا في تأريخ الأدب الأمريكي كمنفذ من زواج مستبدّ. فضلا عن ذلك، يحلل البحث أسباب وتأثيرات مثل هذا الفعل المخزي.

Introduction

As a significant issue in society, adultery occupies the central position in literature, particularly, in the great poems, plays, and novels. Adultery is a literary theme that acquires its worth from sociological and anthropological concerns for it is directly

connected with the first brick in the construction of life, that is, marriage. It also has been a result of the contradiction of the holy bond, that is, divorce. Not only do the studies pay attention to the meaning of adultery, but also to its causes and effects upon both the individual and society.

To comprehend the meaning of the term adultery, it is essential to look at its definition as well as the historical and modern views concerning it. Adultery is defined as, “sex between a married person and somebody who is not their husband or wife.”[1] This general and brief definition stresses upon an illegal and sexual intercourse between two persons, either both of them are married or one of them. In addition, the definition in general is what the study is concerned with. Yet, it is also important to distinguish between adultery that is the focus of the study from fornication that is a sexual intercourse between two unmarried man and woman.

As far as sociology is concerned, adultery is defined as a “heterosexual intercourse [that] takes place outside of marriage between two persons of whom at least one is married to another person.”[2] Moreover, adultery is associated with social issues like marriage and divorce that may constitute and destroy the unity of both the individual and society. From another standpoint, particularly the religious one, all the three religions condemn adultery as an illicit and sinful act. In the Ten Commandments mentioned in Judaism God addressed Moses, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”[3] While Jesus Christ said in this respect, “. . . anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”[4] Besides, in the Holy Qur’an a warning was mentioned: “Do not near to adultery. Surely it is a shameful deed and evil, opening road to other evils.”[5]

It is well known that adultery is forbidden act consented by all the three religions for it leads to the disintegration and decay of the family as an integral part of society, as well as it leads to the moral corruption of the individual in that society. In order to warn those who committed or even tried to commit such a deed, societies were different in their points of view of condemnation and judgement upon the adulterer or adulteress. Some judge the wrongdoers by death, killing, stoning, and flogging, or even by wearing letter A as a symbol for committing such an act. In this relation, the term adultery seems to carry both moral and religious associations since it is regarded as general and common as marriage itself. Indeed, “written or customary prohibitions or taboos against adultery constitute part of the married code of virtually every society.”[6]

Sociologically, in Western Europe and North America, adultery has become a ground for a divorce. There has remained no punishment since it is not a crime against society. Similarly, adulterers have suffered from society’s disproving attitudes towards them.

Such attitudes totally depended on many cultural, local, and religious factors. Studies of adultery in the United States show that 50% of males and 26% of females had extramarital sex at least once during their lifetime. Besides, quarter of the Americans had sex with someone other than their spouse.[7]

Adultery in American Literature:

The Scarlet Letter* and *The Great Gatsby

The theme of adultery has been utilised in literature for ages widely. The fact of adultery has been a part of the human existence as long as there has been marriage. It causes a conflict between people concerned and their sexual desires, on the one hand, and the sense of loyalty, on the other. In addition to that, it shows a disagreement between social pressure and individual struggle for pursuing happiness. Though it is controversial, the theme of adultery is very common. As a matter of fact, if it had not been for the theme of marriage itself, the concept of adultery would have been meaningless. In almost all societies, marriage is considered as sacred and vital; therefore, adultery is its result if marriage does not meet the needs.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's ***The Scarlet Letter*** is regarded as one of the great novels in the American Literature that deals with the theme of adultery in a great treatment. ***The Scarlet Letter*** is published in 1850 but its setting is seventeenth century Boston, specifically, the Puritan period. Although the novel does not deal with the theme of adultery in explicit details; rather, the novel shows the impact of such a theme upon the individual and society and the people involved too. The protagonist, Hester Prynne, who gave birth to a child from unknown father, at least to the reader and townspeople at the very outset of the novel, suffers from the society's view to her.

The Great Gatsby, from another standpoint, is considered by many to be F. Scott Fitzgerald's finest novel and by others to be the American novel of the greatest impact. Or rather it is a tale of men, women, adultery, and money. In fact, it is a classic story of death, the death of the American dream. Though the main theme of this novel is the decline of the American dream, the theme of adultery is significant, since it is one of the facets of the corruption surrounding the society of the 1920s. To depict such a theme in these two novels, a brief glance should be made to shed light upon the causes and effects of such a disgraceful act. To answer the questions of why it is done and what the consequence is, one should remember that everything begins with marriage.[8]

The Scarlet Letter: Individual's Sin and Society's Punishment

Initially, ***The Scarlet Letter*** achieves an international acclaim for its treatment with the way in which one can notice and feel dissimilar reactions of the individual and society towards adultery, the sinful deed. The novel "begins a tradition of great fiction, and one based upon an interpretation of American ways of life, an exposition of American attitudes, indeed, perhaps, in its portrayal of sin and its consequences."[9] In fact, Hawthorne wishes to convey his own opinion towards the ideals and convictions of the Puritan society and to criticise it through observation of the Puritans to the illegal and forbidden act from different perspectives.

The novelist dealt with the people's reaction to adultery rather than the sinful act itself. In other words, "Hawthorne wanted to transmit something of the history of the Puritans in New England, and also to convey the harshness of their regime as well as to explore the effect of sin and guilt."[10] In such a novel, too, the novelist "was preoccupied with the moral life, with questions of responsibility and motivation, and with moral and psychological effects of sin or misfortune."[11] As a result, the novel can be interpreted as a tale of three sinners: Hester Prynne, the heroine, Arthur Dimmesdale, the reverend clergyman, and Roger Chillingworth, Prynne's husband and a physician. Though the latter is not actual partner in the act of adultery, rather, he is the main reason behind it, at least according to Hester. After his return, Chillingworth confesses to Hester that he is responsible for what happened to his wife, but at the same time she is blamed to. He says,

The reason is not far to seek. It was my folly, and thy weakness. I—a man of thought— . . . what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own . . . ? Nay, from the moment when we came down the old church-steps together, a married pair, I might have beheld the bale-fire of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path!'[12]

Hester's reply is an indication for her surprise and for her feeling of betrayal. Before their marriage, she told him that she is not in love with him. Wondrously, she asks him, did you know that from the very beginning? "[d]epressed as she was, she could not endure this last quiet stab at the token of her shame—'thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any.'" (***SL***, 66-67).

This shows that marriage between Hester and Chillingworth was incompatible and already misshapen according to the couple because of their different cultural backgrounds, emotions, and inclinations. That would lead to either separation or adultery. An appropriate interpretation would be Judith Armstrong's words. Specifically, in her ***The Novel of Adultery***, Armstrong states, "a proper understanding of a society's ideas on adultery necessarily involves an understanding of its ideas on marriage."[13] In that case both of them were sinners towards each other and towards society, as well.

Still, Chillingworth and Hester's incompatibility is further shown through the contrast between Hester's later life and Chillingworth's evil deeds. In addition to that, the physical and emotional distances, put between them, are expressed in Elizabeth Markham's words:

This distance is often represented in the text by a silence that develops between two married characters. Their emotional separation becomes still greater when emotional involvement is withdrawn from the marriage in order to dedicate more feeling to the illicit lover. It is striking to note that emotional distance in the novels of adultery is often reflected by the existence of actual physical distance. Voyages in geographical space create physical distance between the adulterous partner and his or her spouse, while at the same time bridging the gap between the unmarried lovers.[14]

So, there are references to inter-related theme of incompatibility with separation and adultery. Besides, there is "physical distance" that separates the couple who had already been separated spiritually, that is there is no real love between them. Thus, society cannot distinguish between appearance and reality. Such a relentless society has harsh views concerning the main adulteress regardless her invisible partner who is the main cause behind adultery.

In addition, these unsympathetic observations to Hester and Pearl, her daughter, are well shown in the old local women's attitude particularly when they see them standing on the scaffold. In this respect, the voice of society that demands Prynne's punishment is represented by some people who comment:

This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray! Mercy on us, goodwife exclaimed a man in the crowd, is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows? (***SL***, 47)

Hawthorne's direct criticism is directed to the Puritan society specifically its point of view about the sinners or adulterers. As if he wants to say common people are only concerned with the sin and how to get the sinner punished without analysing the reasons behind it or regardless their own invisible sins. The novelist, at the very beginning of the novel, draws the punishment of such a society towards such sinners. He said,

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognized it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison" (***SL***, 43).

One reason of Hawthorne's choice to the 17^{th} century New England as a background of ***The Scarlet Letter*** story is that it is an era of moral decline which was due to the harsh principles of the Puritans who "had the sense of being elect spirits chosen by God to live godly lives both as individuals and as a community."[15] The novelist uses the first scene of the book, entitled "The Prison Door," to set the tone and the atmosphere of the novel. A grey, gloomy environment with people who came to watch a young woman punished. Common people waited in their zeal for prosecution. That is how the Puritans felt. Since Hawthorne himself was a descendent of the New England Puritanism that knew them well. He disapproved at their fanaticism and hypocrisy.

Likewise, in Puritan society, "adultery was not seen merely as a matter between the two parties, but as a breach of contract between those individuals and the community." Reading ***The Scarlet Letter***, one might see himself in a dilemma because many found the embroidery of the letter "A" is a too light sentence, but whipping and execution too harsh. Hawthorne suggests that society should let people suffer individually for their sins. That is, "to redefine it as a private matter," in which the society should not be involved.[16]

Having strong personality, Prynne faces her punishment as brave and shameless woman who tries to justify that the circumstances oblige her to do so. Even the voice of the novelist is heard through the comment of the narrator who shows sympathy towards her own pitiful case:

There can be no outrage, methinks, against our common nature—whatever be the delinquencies of the individual—no outrage more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame; as it was the essence of this punishment to do. In Hester Prynne's instance, however . . . her sentence bore that she should stand a certain time upon the platform, but without undergoing that gripe about the neck and confinement of the head, the proneness to which was the most devilish characteristic of this ugly engine. (***SL***, 51)

The general outlook of Prynne and her daughter is significant because it reveals the opinions of both the individual and society. As a townsman told Chillingworth: "to find yourself, at length, in a land where iniquity is searched out, and punished in the sight of rulers and people; as here in our godly New England" (***SL***, 56). The general opinion of the New England for the punishment of adultery is death. As a result,

The penalty thereof is death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart, they have doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space of three hours on the platform of the pillory, and then and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life, to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom. . . . Thus she will be a living sermon against sin, until the ignominious letter be engraved upon her tombstone. (***SL***, 57)

To Hawthorne "Hester's sin . . . is excessive passion; because it is a natural transgression, an expression of her vital energy, she is stronger than either Dimmesdale or Chillingworth. . . . She compounds the sin of passion with the sin of pride."[17] That is to say, Hester depicts the portrait of woman to Hawthorne who introduces her as "partially penitent sinner," rather than a "secret" or "unpardonable" sinners as both Dimmesdale and Cillingworth respectively."[18]

Symbolically, there are two lively symbols of Hester's sin: Pearl and the scarlet letter. As a child of two guilty lovers, Pearl represents the permanent indication to Hester's act of adultery. But Hawthorne skilfully characterises the child and intentionally uses her as a critical point of view against the Puritan society. In this respect, "To her mother and to all the Puritan characters she is a living emblem of the mother's sin, and one major part of Hawthorne's criticism of Puritan thinking is that society's insistence on seeing human beings merely as emblems."[19] Nevertheless,

Pearl, who was a dauntless child, after frowning, stamping her foot, and shaking her little hand with a variety of threatening gestures, suddenly made a rush at the knot of her enemies, and put them all to flight. She resembled, in her fierce pursuit of them, an infant pestilence—the scarlet fever, or some such half-fledged angel of judgment—whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation. She screamed and shouted, too, with a terrific volume of sound, which, doubtless, caused the hearts of the fugitives to quake within them. The victory accomplished, Pearl returned quietly to her mother, and looked up, smiling, into her face. (***SL***, 91)

Furthermore, it constitutes the main significance throughout the whole novel, so she "represents the conscience of the community, and evidence the community is inevitably concerned in the actions of the individuals who may wish to escape it."[20] The scarlet letter signifies, at the first place, Hester's shameful deed, adultery. Similarly, it is a "mark of shame" that Hester has to wear upon her bosom so that she would be "a living sermon against sin" until her death. It also stands for an adulteress, since she is presented to people and to readers "with the scarlet token of infamy on her breast; with the sin-born infant in her arms."[21]

Hawthorne delivers a message by showing two different opinions towards Hester's adultery, and her daughter of that act: the Puritans' and the nature's by describing the whole atmosphere as being sympathised with them. Gabriel's comment makes the picture clear:

Seen from a Puritan standpoint Hester is guilty of a terrible sin and Pearl is the visible and living symbol of that sin seen from a natural perspective Hester's adultery with the man she loves is normal, perhaps even laudable, and nature's approval of her action can be seen in the fruit of that union, a child completely untainted by the false code of the Puritans and thus able to fulfil all her natural instincts.[22]

The real purpose of Hester's acceptance to wear the scarlet letter is that to reveal her courage and dared character. She, unlike her lover and her husband, accepts

[T]he judgement of society while recognising its limited and conventional character . . . she is free of Chillingworth, who can do nothing to her which she has not already done to herself. . . . For her the letter is perhaps only a sign of her involvement in man's fallen condition and by accepting its conventional non-natural character, she is able to transform it into the mark of Able, a nun's cross, a sign of high worth.[23]

Although Hester suggests running away with Dimmesdale, but that does not mean she becomes weak in confronting her fate; instead, she is involved with her needle work, that is, to beautify the letter and changing it from a stigma into a medal. In this regard,

The Puritan society asserts its authority over the individual conscience by forcing Hester to accept her punishment. She could avoid this punishment by running away alone or with Dimmesdale. Neither Hester nor Dimmesdale manages to run away because their own minds will not allow them to run away. Actually, Hester triumphs over her circumstance by her vocation (needle work) and her implicit acceptance of her punishment; Dimmesdale [wins] by his confession and public acknowledgement of sin.[24]

Besides, there is an indication to the "religious morality" that is connected with the analysis of the whole situation. In fact, the most significant point to be mentioned here is the individual's morality rather than the society's. That is why the interrelated theme of isolation or alienation is apparent here. This is one of the characteristics of the Transcendentalists to whom Hawthorne is fully indebted in this sense. In other words,

[T]he issue of the faith in religious morality is less important here than the question of individual conscience. Hence, it is Hester's private morality which is correct; and either the social morality is completely wrong, or it is no more in the right than Hester's morality. The emphasis on the individual, right over here, is typically 19th century, and it may have owed its origin to Hawthorne being under the influence the . . . transcendentalists. This position would be that Hester may have offended a social or moral code; but so have the others, like Dimmesdale, Chillingworth . . . . Therefore, if a whole society is corrupt or sinful, the individual whose conscience (and not society) makes him do his penance is sensitive to . . . whole society.[25]

The impact of Transcendentalism is clear in Hester behaviour. “When Chillingworth tells Hester that the Puritans are planning to ask Hester not to wear the scarlet letter any longer,” the latter says “that it is not for the community to decide when to abate her punishment, which is as mental and psychological as it is social.” So, she transcends herself upon the society which is no more a cause fro her trouble. She tells to Dimmesdale, “What we did had a consecration of its own. Also, she may still wear the letter “A,” but the meaning of the word has now changed from “adulteress” to “Able” or “Angle.” Similarly,

With her patience, courage, and humility, allied to good deeds, Hester proves that she is as good a Puritan as anybody else. She has been true to her own self-ordained punishment. She feels her sin both through the scarlet letter and the child Pearl, but she never tortures herself as Dimmesdale does.[26]

In ***The Scarlet Letter***, sin is committed, now what is to come? For all the parties involved, the result is too harsh and almost unbearable. Hence, “sin . . . is a violation of only that which the sinner thinks he [or she] violates.”[27] Sin not only results in Hester’s isolation, but also in Dimmesdale’s and Chillingworth’s. Such isolation creates so much suffering. Dimmesdale’s punishment may be the worst. He punishes himself physically and spiritually, for he had not the courage to set forth to declare himself adulterer.

The relief comes for him at the end of the novel and his life; he calls to the people of New England: “Ye, that have loved me . . . ! that have deemed me holy!—behold me here, the one sinner of the world! At last—at last—I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood” (***SL***, 225). Hence, he gives his daughter a father, something Pearl had sought for years. For Hester, the punishment is more physically than spiritually. She embroiders the letter A on her gowns, but she does it passionately. That is not because of her pride in her sin, but because she considers it something in harmony with her nature.

Moreover, she does not accept the community punishment as legal or right. “How strange,” writes Hawthorne, “Man had this woman’s sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent . . . efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her . . . God, as a direct

consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child" (***SL***, 79-80). Hester embraces both punishments out of love. She does not want to leave because of the presence of Dimmesdale, and she protects her bastard's child with the passion of tender and loving mother. ***The Scarlet Letter*** carries a heavy moral lesson. God is present. However, the interpretations of God's law by the Puritans may not satisfy many, the moral lesson of Hester's story remains intact.

To sum up the whole matter, one needs not to focus on the act of adultery which happened before the novel begins, rather on its sociological effects in Hester's case, as well as, psychological in Dimmesdale's and Chillingworth's different situations. In this respect, as one critic says: "***The Scarlet Letter*** is not merely the study of a singular fall from grace; it is an artistic elaboration of how one sin or flaw affects not only the participants but also the onlookers."[28]

***The Great Gatsby*: The Ill-conceived Marriage as a Cause of Adultery**

By 1920s, the years involved in ***The Great Gatsby***, women had equal rights in the courts of law, they could vote, they could get divorced, and almost enjoyed the same freedom given to men in the books of law. But with the new freedom came new concepts; a redefining of the old and accepted concepts such as the roles of mother, wife, mistress, and many things.

In fact, society agrees that adultery is wrong, but, does this mean to put restrictions? Do these restrictions make the option of adultery less disastrous? Does society care about the reasons behind committing such acts? In regard to ***The Scarlet Letter*** and ***The Great Gatsby***, there are several reasons which cause the hero to commit adultery. It is essential to begin with the most important one, the ill-conceived marriage.[29]

Unlike the Puritan society in ***The Scarlet Letter***, ***The Great Gatsby*** deals with post First War World society, particularly in the twenties that has "been called the Gay Twenties, The Jazz Age, The Aspirin Age and many other names which indicate an atmosphere of excess and excitement."[30] Being a great social satire in that time, the novel deals with "a gross, materialistic, careless society of coarse wealth spread on the top of a sterile world."[31] Furthermore, the novel is a "direct moral assessment" in the view of Fitzgerald who succeeds "in internalizing the times—the spirit of a whole race going hedonistic,

deciding on pleasure," and in "sensing the economic cost to be charged, the moral intense due."[32]

Fitzgerald himself was influenced heavily by middle-western inclination to money, power, and urbanity. He mentions, "It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess and it was an age of satire."[33] As a result, there is a huge difference between the haves and the have-nots in society. A society of wealth that could not truly accept people suchlike Gatsby just because of his birthright. In such a society, morality has no place; corruption lurks everywhere; and material values are preferable. Daisy and Tom are representatives of such a society.[34]

Fitzgerald tries to expose the values and manners of the American society in the twenties. So, he puts an emphasis upon the incompatible marriage between Tom and Daisy. This incompatibility is shown by Daisy when she describes her feelings in her delivery to Nick. Daisy feels that she has been fooled and betrayed by her husband, therefore, she says, "It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about—things. Well, she [Her daughter] was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where"[35]

Nick, then, understands that Daisy's feeling was correct because Tom takes him to meet his girlfriend, Myrtle. Tom tells Nick, "Though I was curious to see her, I had no desire to meet her—but I did. . . . I want you to meet my girl" (***GG***, 24). The description of Nick to Mrs. Wilson, Myrtle is a reference to the treatment of the novelist to Myrtle as a symbol of physical attraction which is the cause of adultery beside other things. Nick continues,

She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her flesh sensuously, as some women can. Her face . . . contained no facet or gleam of beauty, but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering. She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye. Then she wet her lips, and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice. (***GG***, 25)

Another important point to be mentioned here is her soft seductive manner towards Tom; and her coarse and cruel behaviour towards her husband. That is to say, she is satisfied with Tom rather than with her husband. In addition, there are some reasons that justify each one's inclination, that is, Tom's and Myrtle's inclination towards each other. This justification is expressed by Catherine, Myrtle's sister, who explains to Nick their circumstances while they are all in the New York apartment. She states, "Neither of them can stand the person they're married to. Can't they? Can't stand them. . . . What I say is,

why go on living with them if they can't stand them? If I was them I'd get a divorce and get married to each other right away. Doesn't she like Wilson either?" (***GG***, 31)

In this way, Myrtle's confession concerning her marriage to Wilson and her reasons to leave him are revealed to Nick who is listening and analysing carefully. Myrtle claims,

I married him [Wilson] because I thought he was a gentleman . . . I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe . . . . The only crazy I was when I married him. I knew right away I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody's best suit to get married in and never even told me about it, and the man came after it one day when he was out. (***GG***, 33)

The confession refers to the preference of social values and the aspiration to high class advantages and there is a reference to of inability of providing every day food and to the impotency too. In this respect, Keath Fraser, in "Another Reading of ***The Great Gatsby***" states that, "[t]he allusion to breeding appears to be about class, but the drift beneath seems sexual. The highly-sexed Myrtle is childless, and her husband's impotence, if that is the reason for her constant desire to escape him, seems suitably complemented by the wasteland of ashes in which he dwells."[36]

These are partly the reasons according to Myrtle's relationship with her husband. But still there are other reasons in preferring Tom at the expense of Wilson, her husband. In describing her first meeting with Tom, Myrtle stresses on the class distinction, the physical appearance, and the luxurious clothes of Tom. She goes on saying:

He [Tom] had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes, and I couldn't keep my eyes off him, but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head. When we came into the station he was next to me and his white shirt-front pressed against my arm, and so I told him I'd have to call a policeman, but he knew I lied. . . . All I kept thinking about, over and over, was You can't live forever; you can't live forever." (***GG***, 34)

From another standpoint, the confrontation between Tom and Gatsby in the Plaza in front of Daisy, Nick, and Jordan is significant because it focuses on many issues at the same time. It shows Gatsby's pride and Daisy's preference to wealth and her critical situation between her husband and her ex-lover. Additionally, the incident shows a critical and ironical commentary mentioned by Tom who although commits adultery, criticises the decline of society at that time. Similarly, "It is interesting to note that Tom Buchanan is bewildered in this changing world. Despite his own moral failings he grumbles at his wife's new-found freedom"[37] Likewise, Tom suspiciously asks Gatsby:

What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow . . . ? I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out. . . . Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions. . . . I know I'm not very popular. I don't give big parties. I suppose you've got to make your house into a pigsty in order to have any friends—in the modern world.'" (***GG***, 112)

Here is the first seed of suspicion of the stranger's ability in making love with Tom's wife. The position of women is also emphasized here. The readers can notice and "realize that the freedom of women, not only to vote, but also to move freely in society is a relatively recent achievement." The female characters "represent the new liberty of women to be themselves or, at least, to act in any way they chose."[38]

Furthermore, part of Gatsby's and Daisy's relationship and part of his own dream and stream of history are revealed by Gatsby, who triumphantly and arrogantly thinks he can restore Daisy back. He wishes her to leave Tom and returns to him. So he exploits his strength by having the required wealth in winning Daisy through her weakness in getting such wealth rather than love. Gatsby addresses Tom,

Your wife doesn't love you. . . . She's never loved you. She loves me. . . . She never loved you, do you hear . . . ? She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved any one except me! (***GG***, 113)

This conversation happens during their travel to New York at the Plaza hotel where there Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Nick, and Baker. Gatsby's reply is to justify his move. Daisy's confession is significant too because she prefers somehow Gatsby but she belongs to Tom. She admits,

I never loved him [Tom]. . . . Oh, you [Gatsby] want too much . . . ! I love you now—isn't that enough? I can't help what's past.' She began to sob helplessly. 'I did love him once—but I loved you too.' Gatsby's eyes opened and closed. 'You loved me too?' he repeated. (***GG***, 115)

In this respect, Gatsby's emotions are linked with history: he wants to come back into the past when he and Daisy were in love with each other. Thus, Jeffrey Steinbeck in his "Boats Against the Currents: Morality and the Myth of Renewal in ***The Great Gatsby***," declares that "Gatsby's accomplishments are a credit to his energy, enthusiasm, and single mindedness, his sheer determination at all costs to stem the flow of history's current."[39]

The love affair between Gatsby and Daisy is essential in a way it shows parts of real personalities of both lovers. For Gatsby, it is his main goal, the required American Dream, for Daisy, it is her corrupted American Dream. That is, Gatsby employs the means of social values to get his spiritual love; while Daisy neglects Gatsby's true love in order to get wealth and prosperous life. Likewise,

Fitzgerald, then, has a sure control when he defines the quality of this love affair. He shows it in itself as vulgar and specious . . . the affair works itself out as human history . . . Daisy's significance in the story lies in her failure to represent the objective correlative of Gatsby's vision. And at the same time, Daisy's wonderfully representative quality as a creature of the Jazz Age relates her personal failure to the larger failure of Gatsby's society to satisfy his need. In fact, Fitzgerald never allows Daisy's failure to become a human or personal one. He maintains it with sureness on a symbolic level where it is identified with and reflects the failure of Gatsby's decadent American world.[40]

That is why Daisy is likened to money and wealth in her own way of speaking which is represented by Gatsby and Nick while talking about her. Nick says,

She's got an indiscreet voice. . . . It's full of—I hesitated. Her voice is full of money, he [Gatsby] said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it. . . . High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl. . . (***GG***, 104).

From another perspective, the marriage of Tom Buchanan and Daisy in ***The Great Gatsby*** is in no way an incompatible marriage. Yet, they both are alike. They both are rich and come from a good background and they care nothing for people around them, both materialistic and corrupted. The gap between them is caused by Tom's adultery. So, Daisy wants to bridge that gap by returning to Gatsby or at least temporarily.

Besides, she goes to his house and spends the afternoons there. ***The Great Gatsby*** is a novel about the corruption of the American individuals. Daisy's adultery is not only for material reasons; it is also to take revenge on Tom's affair with Mrs. Wilson. If their marriage in no way can be called an incompatible marriage; it is an ill-conceived one. It breeds trouble for other people. Tom's and Daisy' acts of adultery bring death; none of them even care. Yet, both of them need to prove his authority, and his or her existence. Their carelessness towards the society's obligations and moral standards is awe-raising. Daisy does not want to get divorced from her husband; nonetheless, she wants to keep her affair with Gatsby. Gatsby, in the middle of this, is to be blamed as well. For him,

Daisy is the representative of everything he had dreamt of. This image is corrupted and it is an omen of death. As a result, he fails to see that and the consequence is his death.[41]

The Great Gatsby presents a very different attitude towards adultery. If in ***The Scarlet Letter***, Hester was punished by society, Daisy is spared. In the Jazz Age there was no punishment for her sin or even Tom's. There was no moral judgement upon their acts of adultery. Everything is corrupted, and the only objection comes from Jordan. Daisy kisses Gatsby and, in this respect, Jordan says, "You forget there's a lady present," "I don't care," was Daisy's answer (***GG***, 126).

The Great Gatsby has been seen as a symbolic novel. The looming eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg perhaps are the most profound symbol. Wilson regards them as the eyes of God. These eyes watch how the poor are oppressed by the rich, but they remain silent. The billboard contains "Doctor Eckleburg's persistent stare" (***GG***, 24) that watches over the valley indifferently. Similarly, the death of the down-trodden poor and the corruption of the rich are noticed only.

This god or anti-god is not capable of making judgement. When George Wilson discovers his wife's infidelity, he pushes her towards the window to face these eyes. Thus, he comments, "God knows what you've been doing. . . . You may fool me, but you can't fool God" (***GG***, 154). Yet, one cannot help feeling that her death is not a punishment, but no more than a result of carelessness of the rich people. After that Myrtle complaints, "'Beat me . . . ! Throw me down and beat me, you dirty little coward!" (***GG***, 118) The reasons behind Myrtle's death are exposed by Nick who describes the whole incident depending on Michaelis' account:

A moment later she rushed out into the dusk, waving her hands and shouting—before he could move from his door the business was over. The 'death car' as the newspapers called it, didn't stop; it came out of the gathering darkness, wavered tragically for a moment, and then disappeared around the next bend. Mavromichaelis wasn't even sure of its colour—he told the first policeman that it was light green. The other car, the one going toward New York, came to rest a hundred yards beyond, and its driver hurried back to where Myrtle Wilson, her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick, dark blood with the dust. (***GG***, 118-119)

The car which is a symbol of luxury and wealth becomes a symbol of death in that case. Gatsby's death cannot be seen as God's or society's punishment, but as a result of Gatsby's failure to realise the corruption of his dream. Tom is an accomplice in Gatsby's

death, yet, he neither regrets nor cares. He and Daisy can afford to be careless, to violate the order of marriage, to trespass God's law. For them, there is no God other than their material values. Nick as a commentator describes the Buchanans in comparison with Gatsby by saying, "They're a rotten crowd" "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (***GG***, 133).

Few attend the funeral of Gatsby; Gatsby's father tells Nick that "He had a big future before him, you know. He was only a young man but he had a lot of brain power here" (***GG***, 145). Nick approves of that and then concludes that "I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (***GG***, 152). Nick notices the differences between forms of behaviours in many parts of the novel. He notices the casualness of Eastern manners. In ***The Great Gatsby***, the society and the individual are both indifferent to the act of adultery, sin, and punishment. While ***The Scarlet Letter***, adultery is punished both by the society and the individual.

Adultery, then, is a privilege rather than a sin. It is an opportunity to restore the past. In the case of Tom, adultery is just a physical need. For Gatsby, it is to prove that his dream is not a failure. For Daisy, it is entertaining and vengeful at the same time. For Mrs. Wilson, adultery is a way to get out of the position she abhors. Only Tom and Daisy are the survivals of these affairs, for they belong to the class which can afford committing a sin and not to be punished.[42]

Conclusion

Hawthorne's ***The Scarlet Letter*** strongly pleads for the case of the heart. The novelist wants to say that the law of love is the ultimate law because it is the negation of law. A heart rooted in love overcomes the right thing to do and it leads to an action of love. Hawthorne defines the act of adultery in a private attitude. It must be punished, but the

suffering must come from the sinner's heart and conscience. Prior to all this, marriage should be regarded not merely as a legal obligation, but also something holy. If marriage becomes an obstacle in the way of love, then adultery becomes the inevitable result.

The word that can sum up the theme in Fitzgerald's ***The Great Gatsby*** is position. The word involves class, wealth, status, and the morals of people. Gatsby spent his whole life trying to get wealth and position. Daisy and Tom, on the other hand, know how rich people can use their position to look down on the others and live their life carelessly. Adultery for them is just a self-expression; a means to get what they desire. For Gatsby, it is not adultery at all, since he wants Daisy to confess that he is the only one whom she had ever loved. The corruption of their souls and of their community prevents any moral judgment towards their acts.

Adultery is not the central issue in both novels, but all the main characters in both are revolving on it whether as a means or as an end. If adultery at the time of ***The Scarlet Letter*** was considered a hideous crime not only against God, but against the community of men, then, in the time of ***The Great Gatsby***, it is seen as the woman's right to be free to achieve her desire, even outside her bond of marriage to her husband. In addition, adultery happens, on the one hand, as a result of difficult and restricted as well as of easy and free circumstances in two different societies. On the other hand, adultery is caused by incompatible marriages and social statuses. In both cases it is regarded as a sin that is why there is a punishment in almost all cases.

Notes

[1]A S Hornby, ***Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary***, 8th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

[2]Jack Goody, "A Comparative Approach to Incest and Adultery," in The British Journal of Sociology, Vol.7 No.4 (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1956), 287. <http://WWW. jstor. org/stable/586694.com> [accessed December 17, 2012].

[3]The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917. Microsoft Corporation, Encarta Encyclopaedia, 2008. (Exodus 19-24) [CD. ROM]

[4]Ibid, (Mathew, 5.28).

[5]Ibid, (Qur'an, 17.32)

[6]"Adultery," in Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, <http://www. britannica. com/EB checked/topic/ 6618/adultery> [accessed January 15, 2013]

[7]"Adultery" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adultery.com> [accessed January 15, 2013]

[8]"Adultery in Great Gatsby and Scarlet Letter," in 123HelpMe.com. http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=67975 [accessed January 15, 2013]

[9]A. N. Jeffares, "Introduction," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, ***The Scarlet Letter*** (Beirut: York Press, 1988), xi.

[10]Ibid. xii.

[11]David Levin, "Nathaniel Hawthorne, ***The Scarlet Letter***," in ***The Voice of America Forum Lectures The American Novel*** (Washington: The Voice of America), 11.

[12]Nathaniel Hawthorne, ***The Scarlet Letter*** (Beirut: York Press, 1988), pp.66-67. All subsequent quotations cited in the text are from this edition, with the abbreviation ***SL*** and the page number(s).

[13]Judith Armstrong, ***The Novel of Adultery*** (London: The Macmillan press Ltd, 1976), 1.

[14]Elizabeth Markham, "The Routes of Adultery: Physical and Imaginary Movement in ***Ethan Frome*** and ***Madam Bovary***" (Michigan, Michigan University, 2003), 1.

[15]"Puritanism" in Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, <http://www. Britannica. com/EB checked/topic/ 6618/adultery> [accessed January 15, 2013]

[16]"Adultery," <http://WWW. Gradesaver.com> [accessed January 15, 2013]

[17]Levin, 13.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., 15.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Gabriel Josipovici, ***The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction***, 2nd ed. (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1979), 164.

[22]Ibid., 168.

[23]Ibid., 173.

[24]Suresh, ***Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter: A Critical Study*** 27th ed. (New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 2009), 91.

[25]Ibid., 90.

[26]Ibid.

[27]"Adultery," <http://WWW. Gradesaver.com.>

[28]Quoted in Suresh, 6.

[29]"Adultery in Great Gatsby and Scarlet Letter"123HelpMe.com. <http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=67975>

[30]J. F. Wyatt, "Commentary," in F. Scott Fitzgerald, ***The Great Gatsby*** (London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974), 163.

[31]Malcolm Bradbury, ***The Modern American Novel***, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 87.

[32]Ibid., 89.

[33]Wyatt, 163.

[34]"Adultery in Great Gatsby and Scarlet Letter"123HelpMe.com. <http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=67975>

[35]F. Scott Fitzgerald, ***The Great Gatsby*** (London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974), 18. All subsequent quotations cited in the text are from this edition, with the abbreviation ***GG*** and the page number(s).

[36]Keath Fraser, "Another Reading of ***The Great Gatsby***," in ***F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*** ed., Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers), 60-61.

[37]Wyatt, 164.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Jeffrey Steinbrink, "Boats Against the Current": Morality and the Myth of Renewal in ***The Great Gatsby***," in ***The American Classics Revisited: Recent Studies of American Literature*** ed., P.C. Kar and D. Ramakrishma (Hyderabad: American Studies Research Centre, 1985), 409.

[40]Marius Bewley, "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America," in ***F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays*** ed., Arthur Mizener (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 133-134.

[41]"Adultery in Great Gatsby and Scarlet Letter," 123HelpMe.com. <http://www.123helpme.com/preview.asp?id=67975.com>

[42]Ibid.

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